

Lithuanian Nocturne: to Tomas Venclova
ЛИТОВСКИЙ НОКТЮРН: ТОМАСУ ВЕНЦЛОВА
de Joseph Brodsky

Tomas Venclova

I
Взбаламутивший море
ветер рвется как ругань с расквашенных губ
в глубь холодной державы,
заурядное до-ре-
ми-фа-соль-ля-си-до извлекая из каменных труб.
Не-царевны-не-жабы
припадают к земле,
и сверкает звезды оловянная гривна.
И подобье лица
растекается в черном стекле,
как пощечина ливня.

II
Здравствуй, Томас. То - мой
призрак, бросивший тело в гостинице где-то
за морями, гребя
против северных туч, поспешает домой,
вырываясь из Нового Света,
и тревожит тебя.

III
Поздний вечер в Литве.
Из костелов бредут, хороня запятые
свечек в скобках ладоней. В продрогших дворах
куры роются клювами в жухлой дресве.
Над жнивьем Жемайтии
вьется снег, как небесных обитателей прах.
Из раскрытых дверей
пахнет рыбой. Малец полуголый
и старуха в платке загоняют корову в сарай.
Запоздалый еврей
по брусчатке местечка гремит балаголой,

вожжи рвет
и кричит залихватски: «Герай!»

IV

Извини за вторжение.
Сочти появление за
возвращенье цитаты в ряды «Манифеста»:
чуть картавей
чуть выше октавой от странствий вдали.
Потому - не крестись,
не ломай в кулаке картуза:
сгину прежде, чем грянет с насеста
петушиное «пли».
Извини, что без спросу.
Не пьются от страха в чулан:
то, кордонов за счет, расширяет свой радиус
бренность.
Мстя, как камень колодцу кольцом грязевым,
над балтийской волной
я жужжу, точно тот моноплан -
точно Дариус и Гиренас,
но не так уязвим.

V

Поздний вечер в Империи,
в нищей провинции.
Вброд
перешедшее Неман еловое войско,
ощетинившись пиками, Ковно в потемки бредет.
Багровеет известка
Трехэтажных домов, и булыжник мерцает, как
пойманный лещ.
Вверх взвизывается занавес в местном театре.
И выносят на улицу главную вещь,

разделенную на три
без остатка;
сквозняк тербит бахрому
занавески из тюля. Звезда в захоlustье
светит ярче: как карта, упавшая в масть.
И впадает во тьму,
по стеклу барабана, руки твоей устье.
Больше некуда впасть.

VI

В полночь всякая речь
обретает ухватки слепца;
так что даже «отчизна» наощупь - как Леди Годива.
В паутине углов
микрофоны спецслужбы в квартире певца
пишут скрежет матраца и всплески мотива
общей песни без слов.
Здесь панует стыдливость. Листва, норовя
выбрать между своей лицевой стороной и изнанкой,
возмущает фонарь. Отменив рупора,
миру здесь о себе возвещают, на муравья
наступив ненароком, невнятной морзянкой
пульса, скрипом пера.

VII

Вот откуда твои
щек мучнистость, безадресность глаза,
шепелявость и волосы цвета спитой,
тусклой чайной струи.
Вот откуда вся жизнь как нетвердая честная фраза,
на пути к запятой.
Вот откуда моей,
как ее продолжение вверх, оболочки
в твоих стеклах расплывчатость, бунт голытьбы

ивняка и т. п. , очертанья морей,
их страниц перевернутость в поисках точки,
горизонта, судьбы.

VIII

Наша письменность, Томас! с моим, за поля
выходящим сказуемым! с хмурым твоим
домоседством
подлежащего! Прочный, чернильный союз,
кружева, вензеля,
помесь литеры римской с кириллицей: цели
со средством,
как велел Макроус!
Наши оттиски! в смятых сырых простынях -
этих рыхлых извилинах общего мозга! -
в мягкой глине возлюбленных, в детях без нас.
Либо - просто синяк
на скуле мироздания от взгляда подростка,
от попытки на глаз
расстоянье прикинуть от той ли литовской корчмы
до лица, многооко смотрящего мимо,
как раскосый монгол за земной частокол,
чтоб вложить пальцы в рот - в эту рану Фомы -
и, нащупав язык, на манер серафима
переправить глагол.

IX

Мы похожи;
мы, в сущности, Томас, одно:
ты, коптящий окно изнутри, я, смотрящий снаружи.
Друг для друга мы суть
обоюдное дно
амальгамовой лужи,
неспособной блестять.

Покривись - я отвечу улыбкой кривой,
отзовусь на зевоту немотой, раздирающей полость,
разольюсь в три ручья
от стоватной слезы над твоей головой.
Мы - взаимный конвой,
проступающий в Касторе Поллукс,
в просторечье - ничья,
пат, подвижная тень,
приводимая в действие жаркой лучиной,
эхо возгласа, сдача с рубля.
Чем сильнее жизнь испорчена, тем
мы в ней неразличимей
ока праздного дня.

X

Чем питается призрак? Отбросами сна,
отрубями границ, шелухой цифири:
иль всегда норовит сохранить адреса.
Переулок сдвигает фасады, как зубы десна,
желтизну подворотни, как сыр простофили
пожирает лиса
темноты. Место, времени мстя
за свое постоянство жильцом, постояльцем,
жизнью в нем, отпирает засов, -
и, эпоху спустя,
я тебя застаю в замусоленной пальцем
сверхдержаве лесов
и равнин, хорошо сохраняющей мысли, черты
и особенно позу: в сырой конопляной
многоверстной рубашке, в гудящих стальных бигуди
Мать-Литва засыпает под плесом,
и ты
припадаешь к ее неприкрытой, стеклянной
поллитровой груди.

XI

Существуют места,
где ничего не меняется. Это -
заменители памяти, кислый триумф фиксажа.
Там шлагбаумы на резкость наводит верста.
Там чем дальше, тем больше в тебе силуэта.
Там с лица сторожа
моложавей. Минувшее смотрит вперед
настороженным глазом подростка в шинели,
и судьба нарушителем пятится прочь
в настоящую старость с плевком на стене,
с ломотой, с бесконечностью форме панели
либо лестницы. Ночь
и взаправду граница, где, как татарва,
территориям прожитой жизни набегом
угрожает действительность, и наоборот
где дрова переходят в деревья и снова в дрова,
где что веко не спрячет,
то явь печенегом
как трофей подберет.

XII

Полночь. Сойка кричит
человеческим голосом и обвиняет природу
в преступленьях термометра против нуля.
Витовт, бросивший меч и похоронивший щит,
погружается в Балтику в поисках броду
к шведам. Впрочем, земля
и сама заверается молом, погнавшимся за
как по плоским ступенькам, по волнам
убежавшей свободой.
Усилья бобра
по постройке запруды венчает слеза,

расставаясь с проворным
ручейком серебра.

XIII

Полночь в лиственном крае,
в губернии цвета пальто.
Колокольная клинопись. Облако в виде отреза
на рядно сопредельной державе.
Внизу
пашни, скирды, плато
черепицы, кирпич, колоннада, железо,
плюс обутый в кирзу
человек государства.
Ночной кислород
наводняют помехи, молитва, сообщенья
о погоде, известия,
храбрый Кощей
с округленными цифрами, гимны, фокстрот,
болеро, запрещенья
безмянных вещей.

XIV

Призрак бродит по Каунасу. Входит в собор
выбегает наружу. Плетется по Лайсвис-аллее.
Входит в «Тюльпе», садится к столу.
Кельнер, глядя в упор,
видит только салфетки, огни бакалеи,
снег, такси на углу;
просто улицу. Бьюсь об заклад,
ты готов позавидовать. Ибо незримость
входит в моду с годами - как тела уступка душе,
как намек на грядущее, как маскхалат
Рая, как затянувшийся минус.
Ибо все в барыше

от отсутствия, от
бестелесности: горы и доли,
медный маятник, сильно привыкший к часам,
Бог, смотрящий на все это дело с высот,
зеркала, коридоры,
соглядатай, ты сам.

XV

Призрак бродит бесцельно по Каунасу. Он
суть твое прибавление к воздуху мысли
обо мне,
суть пространство в квадрате, а не
энергичная проповедь лучших времен.
Не завидуй. Причисли
привиденье к родне,
к свойствам воздуха - так же, как мелкий петит
рассыпаемый в сумраке речью картавой
вроде цокота мух,
неспособный, поди, утолить аппетит
новой Клио, одетой заставой,
но ласкающий слух
обнаженной Урании.
Только она,
Муза точки в пространстве и Муза утраты
очертаний, как скаред - гроши,
в состояньи сполна
оценить постоянство: как форму расплаты
за движенье - души.

XVI

Вот откуда пера,
Томас, к буквам привязанность.
Вот чем
объясняться должно тяготенье, не так ли?

Скрепя
сердце, с хриплым «пора!»
отрывая себя от родных заболоченных вотчин,
что скрывать - от тебя!
от страницы, от букв,
от - сказать ли! - любви
звука к смыслу, бесплодности - к массе
и свободы к - прости
и лица не криви -
к рабству, данному в мясе,
во плоти, на кости,
эта вещь воспаряет в чернильной ночи эмпирей
мимо дремлющих в нише
местных ангелов:
выше
их и нетопырей.

XVII

Муза точки в пространстве! Вещей, различаемых
лишь
в телескоп! Вычитанья
без остатка! Нуля!
Ты, кто горлу велишь
избегать причитанья,
превышения «ля»
и советуешь сдержанность! Муза, прими
эту арию следствия, петую в ухо причине,
то есть песнь двойнику,
и взгляни на нее и ее до-ре-ми,
там, в разреженном чине,
у себя на верху
с точки зрения воздуха.
Воздух и есть эпилог
для сетчатки - поскольку он не обитает.

Он суть наше «домой»,
восвояси вернувшийся слог.
Сколько жаброй его не хватаем,
он успешно латаем
светом взапуски с тьмой.

XVIII

У всего есть предел:
горизонт - у зрачка, у отчаянья - память,
для роста -
расширение плеч.
Только звук отделяться способен от тела,
вроде призрака, Томас.
Сиротство
звука, Томас, есть речь!
Оттолкнув абажур,
глядя прямо перед собою,
видишь воздух:
анфас
сонмы тех, кто губою
наследил в нем
до нас.

XIX

В царстве воздуха! В равенстве слога глотку
кислорода. В прозрачных и сбившихся в облак
наших выдохах. В том
мире, где, точно сны к потолку,
к небу льнут наши «о!», где звезда обретает свой
облик,
продиктованный ртом!
Вот чем дышит вселенная. Вот
что петух кукарекал,
упреждая гортани великую сушь!

Воздух - вещь языка.
Небосвод -
хор согласных и гласных молекул,
в просторечии - душ.

XX

Оттого-то он чист.
Нет на свете вещей, безупречней
(кроме смерти самой)
отбеляющих лист.
Чем белее, тем бесчеловечней.
Муза, можно домой?
Восвояси! В тот край,
где бездумный Борей попирает беспечно трофеи
уст. В грамматику без
препинания. В рай
алфавита, трахеи.
В твой безликий ликбез.

XXI

Над холмами Литвы
что-то вроде мольбы за весь мир
раздается в потемках: бубнящий, глухой, невеселый
звук плывет над селеньями в сторону Куршской
косы.
То Святой Казимир
с Чудотворным Николой
коротают часы
в ожидании зимней зари.
За пределами веры,
из своей стратосферы,
Муза, с ними призри
на певца тех равнин, в рукотворную тьму
погруженных по кровлю,

на певца усмиренных пейзажей.
Обнеси своей стражей
дом и сердце ему.

LITHUANIAN NOCTURNE: TO TOMAS VENCLOVA

[I] Wind, having roughened the sea, / bursts forth like cursing from bruised lips / deep within the cold superpower, / pulling a plain do-re- / (5) mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do from chimneys. / Neither princesses, nor toads / genuflect to the ground, / and a tin dime of a star sparkles. / And the semblance of a face / (10) spreads itself through the black glass, / like the slap of downpour. // [II] Greetings, Tomas. That is my / spectre, having abandoned the body in some / overseas hotel room, rowing / (15) against the northern clouds, it hurries home / tearing out of the New World / to bother you. // [III] A late evening in Lithuania. / They wander from churches, burying the commas / (20) of candles in the brackets of [their] palms. In the freezing courtyards / hens dig with their beaks in the dry-rotted sawdust. / Over the stubble of Zhemaitia / snow weaves like celestial cloisters' ashes. / From the doors flung open - / (25) the smell of fish. A half naked boy / and an old kerchiefed woman chase a cow into the barn. / A Jewish cabby in a cart, hurries late / drumming the village's cobblestones, / yanks the reins / (30) and roars 'Gerai!' ['O.K.']. // [IV] Pardon this invasion. / Consider this sighting as / the return of a quote back to the rows of the 'Manifesto': / a bit more burred / (35) and with higher pitch thanks to distant wanderings. / So don't cross yourself, / don't tear at the tassel: / I'll be off before the cock's 'fire!' bursts from the roost. / (40) Pardon such an intrusion. / Don't back off in fright into the pantry: / it's merely one's mortality expanding

its radius at the expense of borders. / Avenging myself, like the pebble – the well with its muddy ring / (45) over the Baltic wave, / I buzz just like a monoplane, / like some Darius and Girenas, / though not as vulnerable. // [V] Late evening in the Empire / (50) in a destitute province. / Having waded across the Neman, / an army of conifers bristling with lances / takes Kaunas into the darkness. / The stucco of three-storied houses / (55) turns scarlet, and cobblestones glisten / like bream in a net. / Up soar the curtains of some local theatre. / And the most important thing gets brought out / to be divided by three / (60) down to the last drop. / A draft worries the fringe of / a tulle curtain. A star in the middle of nowhere / shines brighter, like a card following suit. / And river-like, your hand / falls drumming the glass into darkness. / (65) Nowhere else to fall. // [VI] At midnight [any] speech / acquires the ways of the blind. / So that even 'homeland' to the touch is like Lady Godiva. / (70) In the web of corners / of the bard's room, the microphones of the special service / tape the screeching mattress and the splash of / a common song without words. / Here shame is in charge. Leaves / (75) torn between turning heads or tails / irritate a lamppost. Having no use for loudspeakers, / one informs the world of oneself by inadvertently stepping on an ant, / in the indecipherable morse of one's pulse, / the scratch of one's pen. // [VII] (80) Hence the mealiness of / your cheeks, your stare aimed nowhere, / the lisp and the hair dull like the colour / of a stream of old tea. / Hence all of life like some soft honest phrase / (85) moving comma-ward. / Hence the upward continuation of my membrane / washed out in your windows, / the mutiny of the masses of willow twigs, etc. outlines of seas, / (90) their upside down

pages in search of a full stop, / the horizon, fate. //
 [VIII] Our writing, Tomas! With my predicates /
 [spilling] beyond margins! With your dour, home-
 body / (95) subjects! A sturdy alliance of ink, / lace,
 monograms, / the mixtures of Roman typeset with
 Cyrillic, ends with means, / as per 'Macrowhiskey'!
 [Stalin] / (100) Our imprints, in damp wrinkled
 sheets, / the dumpy convolutions of our common brain,
 / in the soft clay of the beloved, in the children without
 us. / Or else, a mere bruise / on the cheekbone of the
 universe from the glance of the adolescent, / (105) from
 the attempt to determine at a glance / the distance be-
 tween this one, is it? Lithuanian inn / and the face,
 multi-eyed, looking past / like some squint-eyed Mon-
 golian at the palisade, / so that he might stick his fin-
 gers into his mouth, that wound of Thomas, / (110)
 and feeling his tongue, in the manner of some Sera-
 phim / redirect the verb. // [IX] We're alike. / We, in
 essence, Tomas, are one; / you, smoking the window
 from within, while I looking in from the outside. / (115)
 We're for each other / the common floor / of the amal-
 gamated puddle / incapable of sparkling. / Make a wry
 face, I'll respond with a smirk. / (120) I'll respond to
 your yawn with a gut-tearing speechlessness, / I'll spill
 into three forked rivers / from the hundred watt tear
 [shape] / over your head. / We're a mutual convoy, /
 Pollux seeping through Castor, / (125) or put simply,
 we're a draw, / a stalemate, a moveable shadow / ren-
 dered active by a hot flicker of light, / the echo of a cry,
 change from a rubble. / The more broken the life, the
 more / (130) we re indistinguishable in it / to the idle
 eye. // [X] What feeds a spectre? The refuse of dreams,
 / the husks of borders, the chaff of numerics: / reality
 always tries to hold on to its addresses. / (135) A side

street moves house fronts, like gums moving teeth, /
 the sallow bottom of the courtyard gate, like some sim-
 pleton's cheese, / gets gulped down by the fox of / dark-
 ness. Place begrudging time / its permanence with a
 dweller, a lodger, / (140) life therein, opens the latch, /
 and an epoch later / I find you in the [fingered] slob-
 bered / super-power of forests / and plains, so good at
 preserving thoughts, features, / (145) and above all the
 pose: in its damp multiversted / shirt of hemp, in its
 droning steel curlers, / Mother Lithuania falls asleep
 along the river, / and you / fall to her uncovered, glass
 / (150) half-litre breast. // [XI] There are places /
 where nothing changes. These / are memory substi-
 tutes, the acid triumph of fixing solutions. / The barri-
 ers are brought into focus by versts. / (155) There, the
 further you go, the more of what is left of you is a sil-
 houette. / There the guards appear / younger. What
 has just come to pass looks ahead / with the guarded
 eye of a teen in an overcoat, / and fate, the trespasser,
 backs away / (160) into deep old age with spit upon
 wall[s], / rheumatic aches, and infinity in the form of
 a sidewalk / or a staircase. Night / is indeed the border,
 where like a horde / (165) reality threatens to raid the
 territories of spent life, and vice versa, / where firewood
 joins tree and becomes firewood again. / Where what-
 ever the eyelid covers, / reality, Pecheneg-like, / will
 plunder as spoils. // [XII] (170) Midnight. A [blue]-
 jay / screams / in a human voice blaming nature / for
 the crimes of a thermometer against zero. / Prince Vy-
 tautas, having flung his sword and crossed out his
 shield, / penetrates the Baltic in search of the shoal way
 / (175) toward the Swedes. While earth / itself ends in
 a pier, racing after / as if along flat steps, on the waves
 / of runaway freedom. / All attempts of a beaver / (180)

in building a dam are crowned by a tear, / parting with the quick stream of silver. // [XIII] Midnight in a deciduous region, / in a province the colour of topcoats. / (185) The cuneiform of a belfry. A cloud, a scrap of material, / of burlap for a contiguous nation. / Below / ploughed fields, haystacks, plateaux of / roof tiles, bricks, colonnades, cast-iron, / (190) plus a shod-inersatz leather / man of the state. / Evening's oxygen / gets flooded with static, prayers, weather / reports, announcements, / (195) the brave koshchey / with rounded numbers, hymns, foxtrot, / bolero, the forbidding / of nameless things. // [XIV] A spectre wanders in Kaunas. Enters a cathedral, / (200) runs out. Winds its way down Laisves avenue. / Enters 'Tulpe', takes a seat. / The headwaiter looking straight through it, / sees only the napkins, the grocery's lights, / snow, the taxicab on the corner, / (205) the street itself. I bet you anything / you're envious. Since invisibility / has become 'de rigueur' with the years, as the body's concession to soul, / as a hint of what's to come, as the masked robe of / Heaven, like a drawn-out minus. / (210) Since everyone profits / from absence, from / incorporeality: hill and dale, / the brass pendulum, relying heavily on the clock, / God looking at all of this from up high, / (215) mirrors, corridors, / your tail [spy] and yourself. // [XV] A spectre wanders aimlessly in Kaunas. It / is your addition to the air of thought / about me, / (220) is space in a square / and not / the energetic sermon of better days. / Don't be envious. Rank this ghost / as one of kin, / the properties of air – the same as some fine brevier / (225) scattered in the twilight by burred speech / sort of like the buzzing of flies, / that cannot, go figure, appeal to the appetite / of a new Clio, adorned in an outpost, / but is music / (230) to naked Urania's

ears. / Only she, / Muse of a point in space, Muse of loss / of features, like a miser appreciates his pennies, / can fully / (235) appreciate constancy as a form of retribution / for the movement of the soul. // [XVI] That's where Tomas, the pen's / attachment to letters is from. / That's how / (240) one should explain gravitation, shouldn't one? / Grudgingly, with a hoarse 'it's time!' / tearing oneself away from patrimonial marshlands, / and, frankly, from you! / (245) From the page, from the letters, from – do I dare say it – the love / felt by sound – for sense, by the incorporeal – for mass, / and by freedom – forgive me, / don't make a face – / (250) for slavery, given its flesh form, / meat on the bones, / this thing soars in the inky darkness of empyrean / past the dreaming local angels in niches / (225) above them / and bats. // [XVII] The Muse of a point in space! Of things visible / only / through a telescope! Of subtraction / (260) with nothing left over! Of zero! / You who order the throat / to avoid lamentation / or resist going higher than 'la', / and recommend being reserved! Oh Muse, accept / (265) this aria of effect, sung to the ear of cause, / in other words to one's double, / and observe it and its do-re-mi, / there in its rarefied ranks, / up there, / (270) from air's point of view. / Air is indeed the epilogue / for the retina, since it's uninhabitable. / It is our 'go home', / the syllable returning to its place. / (275) No matter how much of it we grasp with our gills, / it is well patched / with light racing darkness. // [XVIII] Everything has a limit: / the horizon – for [the eye's] pupil, for despair – memory, / (280) for growth – / the widening shoulders. / Only sound is able to separate from body, / like a spectre, Tomas. The orphan / (285) of sound, Tomas, is speech! / Pushing aside the lampshade, / one looks

straight ahead of oneself / and sees – air: in full view / (290) the swarms of those / who with their lips / have left their prints in it / before us. // [XIX] In the kingdom of air! In the equality of a syllable to a gulp of / oxygen! In our transparent whipped into cloud / (295) exhalations! In that / world where like dreams floating to the ceiling / our ‘o’s!’ cling to the palate, where a star acquires its shape / as dictated by the mouth! / (300) That is what the universe breathes by. / That the cock crowed, / forestalling the great drought for the larynx. / Air is a thing of the tongue. / Heaven’s vault is / (305) a molecular chorus of consonants and vowels, / in common parlance – souls. // [XX] That is why it is pure. / There is no other thing more flawless / (other than death itself) / (310) when it comes to bleaching the page. / The whiter, the less human. / Muse, can we go home? / To our place! To that land / where thoughtless Boreas keeps carelessly trampling / the trophies of / (315) the mouth. Into that grammar without / punctuation. Into the paradise of / the alphabet, the trachea. / Into your faceless ‘likbez’. [‘liquidation of illiteracy’] // [XXI] Over Lithuania’s hillocks / (320) something like supplication for all of mankind / is uttered in the darkness: the droning, muffled, cheerless / sound floats above settlements toward Curonian Spit. / That’s St. Casimir and / (325) St. Nicholas the Miracle-maker / whiling time away / in anticipation of winter’s dawn. / Beyond creed, / from its stratosphere, / (330) O Muse! Take in with these two / the singer of these plains, into the manmade darkness / sunk up to the roof, / the singer of pacified landscapes. / Cover with your guard for him / his home and his heart. //

The present work may be seen as a continuation of, or companion work to a previous article on *Lithuanian Divertissement*¹. In that article I touched on questions relating to the unusual position of the researcher, who is analysing a text which is dedicated to him personally (although it is true to say that he is appearing in another role, as a poet and not as a literary scholar). The brief comments made on that occasion still hold true. I am aware that my choice of an object of research not only transgresses the rules of rigorous scientific etiquette, but may also lead to a distortion of perspective. It is difficult (although interesting) to deal with a text while one is being situated at one and the same time both inside and outside it. Incidentally, this difficulty is even more pronounced in the case of *Lithuanian Nocturne* than in that of *Lithuanian Divertissement*. While in the latter the addressee of the poem is present only implicitly, here he is presented as a partner in the dialogue (although not as an active participant: the poem remains a monologue throughout). Nevertheless, the loss is possibly outweighed by the gain. The concrete circumstances and details associated with Brodsky’s poems –and even with the epoch itself– soon fade from the memory of his contemporaries. Those who remember them have a duty to record them. And generally speaking, the opinion of someone who has witnessed events, or participated in them, be that in

1 - Joseph Brodsky "Lithuanian Divertissement", in *The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration* Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984, pp. 191-201. For another version of this article see Tomas Venclova, in "Neustoichivoe ravnovesie: Vosem' russikikh poeticheskikh tekstov" [*Unsteady Equilibrium: Eight Russian Poetic Texts*] New Haven: Yale Center for International and area Studies, 1986, pp. 165-78.

a limited or even biased way, can contribute towards understanding a poet.

One could refer to a *Lithuanian cycle* in Brodsky's works². Included in it would be not only the two poems already mentioned, but also 'Kon'iak v grafine -tsveta iantaria' [Cognac in a Decanter- the Colours of Amber], and several others. For example, "Anno Domini", written in Palanga, transforms the Lithuanian surroundings (including events in the lives of his circle of friends), into defamiliarized ancient, or, rather, medieval forms. "Otkrytka iz goroda K." [Postcard from the Town K.] is dedicated to Königsberg (which was renamed Kaliningrad —a name starting with the same letter—³); but this poem is clearly linked with conversations which took place in Lithuania. It is difficult to establish the boundaries of the cycle. Impressions of Lithuania run through many poems; for example, in "Elegiia" [Elegy]: "Podruga milaia, kabak vse tot zhe..." [My dearest, the tavern is still the same], "pilot pochtovoi linii" [a pilot of a postal line] —refers to a Russian aviator Brodsky met in Palanga, in the restaurant of the hotel "Pajúris", and the restaurant itself is the *kabak* [tavern] mentioned in the first line. As a whole, Lithuania, which Brodsky often visited from 1966 right up to his emigration⁴, thoroughly

influenced his ideas about 'empire' and 'providence' —in "Pis'ma rimskomu drugu" [Letters to a Roman Friend] for example: "esli vypalo v Imperii rodit'sia, / luchshe zhit' v glukhoi provintsii, u moria" [If you happen to be born in an Empire, / it is better to live in a remote province, by the sea] — II: 285⁵. *Lithuanian Nocturne*, written after he had emigrated, is like a completion of the cycle. It is a farewell to Lithuania, which the poet would never see again.

The poem was first published in *Kontinent* (1984, no. 40, pp. 7-18). It was included in *Uraniia* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1987, pp. 55-65) and has since been reprinted many times. It is more difficult to establish when it was written. Neither in *Kontinent* nor in *Uraniia* is there any indication of its date of composition. Later the date was usually fixed at 1973⁶ or 1974⁷. Both dates are inaccurate. It is possible to establish this from my diary, in which many conversations with Brodsky are recorded.

Lithuanian Nocturne was indeed either in 1973 or 1974, that is to say, soon after Brodsky's departure either from Leningrad. At that time I was still living in Lithuania, and the poem was conceived as an epistle to

2 - "Lithuania for a Russian person is always a step in the right direction", Brodsky loved to say. Together with many Russians of his generation, he perceived Lithuania as a "half-western" country (and, incidentally, as an experience of "emigration which stopped just short of emigrating").

3 - Brodsky wrote about Königsberg even before visiting Lithuania: "Einem alten Architekten in Roma" ["To an Old Architect in Rome"].

4 - On this subject see: Ramunas Katilius, "Iosif Brodskii i Litva"

[Joseph Brodsky and Lithuania], *Zvezda* 1997 no. 1, pp. 151-4; Evgenii Rein, "Litva i Brodskii, Brodskii i Litva..." [Lithuania and Brodsky, Brodsky and Lithuania...], *Vilnius*, 1997, no. 2, pp. 112-21; Andrei Sergeev, "O brodskom" [About Brodsky], *Znamia*, 1997, no.4, pp. 139-58.

5 - Brodsky said to me that "for the main part, Lithuania' also served as a model for the play 'Democracy'".

6 - See *Sochineniia Iosifa Brodskogo* [Works of Joseph Brodsky], vol. 2, St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1992, p. 331.

7 - See, for example, Joseph Brodsky, *Bog sokhraniaet vse* [God Preserves Everything], Moscow: Mif, 1992, p.107.

Vilnius: in it are reflected several personal events occurring at that time, with which Brodsky was familiar from my letters. Incidentally, Brodsky said that he wrote the poem in the ‘Wales’ hotel in New York (cf. II. 12-14: “To – moi / prizrak, broshivshii telo v gostinitse gde-to / za moriami...” [“That is my / spectre, having abandoned the body in some / overseas hotel room...”]). However, shortly afterwards the unfinished poem was, according to him, abandoned. Brodsky only came back to it at the end of 1983, when I myself had already long-since emigrated to New Haven, and the subject of the poem — an ‘other-worldly’ meeting of the *émigré* and *non-émigré* — had, so to speak, become purely historical. I will now cite the corresponding extracts from my diary:

11. [December 1983]. [“...”] Brodsky is already home. “Tell me, did Darius and Girenas have a monoplane or a biplane?” He had been intending to write about them for a long time. I said that it was a monoplane, although who knows. [“...”]

19. Brodsky was asking a lot of questions about Vilnius, its towers etc. etc. — for a poem. “At the end there you have to scale a high mountain — I don’t know if I’ll manage it; I am already rather weary of this poem”.

I remember very well that at that particular time Brodsky was questioning me about Saint Casimir (the patron saint of Lithuania) and about Nikolas the Miracle-maker: it follows that at precisely that point he was putting together the last part of the poem (and elaborating the beginning). Thus work on *Lithuanian Nocturne* was drawn out over a whole decade, and the date of composition of the poem should consequently be given as 1973/4 (?)–83.

The time-lapse between *Lithuanian Divertissement*, which was written in 1971, and the start of work on *Lithuanian Nocturne* is slight — either two or three years. Addressed to one and the same addressee and thematically linked, these poems are essentially like the introduction and coda of a single work. Their common theme may be defined as meditations on fate and poetry, and was aroused on visiting a small country, which had been enslaved by a powerful empire. That said, *Lithuanian Divertissement* focuses on fate, played out in different variations and in different registers, *Lithuanian Nocturne*, on poetry, which here, as in all Brodsky’s mature work, is completely coincident with fate. Between the poems there lies an important biographical caesura. The poems also employ contrasting poetics. *Lithuanian Divertissement* is, as I have said previously, generically light-hearted, but with a serious theme breaking through the unconstrainedly comical tone. *Lithuanian Nocturne* is also stuffed with elements of parody and *risqué* jokes, but on the whole it involves poetry “of a high style”, emotionally intense and even sombre. The first poem is, in fact, a cycle. It is a series of sketches, diverse in theme, intonation and rhythm. As I tried to show in my earlier article, they are arranged on the principle of a compositional ring. The second poem is, from beginning to end, a sustained dramatic monologue. It develops against the background of a monotonous landscape. It is also permeated by a single intonational-rhythmical pressure, and possesses plot, development and denouement.

Strictly speaking, this difference is already emphasized in the titles of the poems, which define them as belonging to “musical genres”. While the *divertissement* is a strict musical form basically linked to Ba-

roque and the eighteenth century, the nocturne does not have such well-defined formal characteristics and harks back rather to the age of romanticism. Its sources are sometimes found in the Italian *notturmo* —a collection of light pieces for a chamber ensemble, which were usually performed at night outdoors. However, the typical nocturne differs considerably from the *notturmo*. It is most often simply a meditative composition for the piano, which is loosely defined as being “inspired by night”, or “creating a sense of night”. It takes its beginnings in the teens of the nineteenth century and is linked above all with Chopin, Schumann and Liszt (and in Russia with Glinka, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin). In the modernist era the nocturne genre was significantly revived by Debussy and, in particular, Bartok. This modernized nocturne is not confined to the piano and often has dark, “other-worldly” nuances: it frequently contains imitations of the calls of nocturnal creatures, birds and so on. It is not difficult to observe that Brodsky’s poem corresponds to the musical nocturne, although it is only possible to describe this correspondence in the most general terms: it is a “nocturnal”, “pensive”, “shadowy” work in theme and colouring, not devoid of a romantic element (although on the whole this is re-interpreted through parody).

Let us consider *Lithuanian Nocturne* in more detail —first on a purely formal, then a thematic level⁸.

8 - We will use the text of *Lithuanian Nocturne*, which was published while the poet was still alive in the second volume of *Sochineniia Iosifa Brodskogo*, as indicated above, pp. 322-31. There are comparatively few variations from the form in which the poem was first published, and from the version in *Uraniia*. On the whole they amount to a few differently arranged verses and punctuation, which affect the length of the poem (313 verses in *Kontinent* [*Continent*], 327 in *Uraniia*,

The poem, as is often the case with Brodsky’s mature work, is divided into parts, which are typographically demarcated and numbered (with Roman numerals). In all there are twenty-one of these parts. Each of them is self-contained: nothing is carried over from one to another, although, generally speaking, such enjambments would be entirely possible for Brodsky. It is difficult to call the parts stanzas, owing to the diversity in their construction. The term “chapter” would be more suitable: following Barry Scherr, I will call them sections⁹.

All the sections are written using anapaest of different feet. The number of feet (from rhyme to rhyme) fluctuates within very wide limits —from one (I. 219): ‘obo mne’ [about me] to eight (II. 157-8): “molozhavei. Minuvshee smotrit vpered / nastorozhennym glazom podrostka v shineli” [younger. What has just come to pass looks ahead / with the guarded eye of a teen in an overcoat]¹⁰ (II. 160-1); “v nastoiashchuiu starost’ s plevkom na stene, / c lomotoi, s beskonechnost’iu v

335 in *Sochineniia*, and its syntactical construction. In the last line of chapter (section) IX in *To Uraniia*, a misprint crept in (“oka prazdnogo dnia” instead of “oka prazdnogo dlia”), which was carried forward into *Sochineniia* and several other (although not all) publications; it has been corrected in our text. In *Sochineniia* there is a more precise transcription of the surname “Girenas”, although inaccuracies remain in the transcription of other Lithuanian names (which have similarly been corrected here).

9 - Barry Scherr, “Strofika Brodskogo” (Brodsky’s Versification), in *Poetika Brodskogo: Sbornik statei*, ed. L. Loseff (*The Poetics of Brodsky: A Collection of Articles* Edited by L. V. Loseff), Tenafly, NJ: Hermitage, 1986, p. 98.

10 - However, it is possible to divide this metrical line into two of four feet, if you consider that word *vpered* rhymes with the words *naoborot* and *podberet*, which are situated far away from it in the text.

forme paneli” [into deep old age with spit upon the wall(s), / rheumatic aches, and infinity in the form of a sidewalk]. Lines of two feet predominate (there are 118 of them), followed by lines of four feet (of which there are 92). There are two lines of eight feet, one of six feet, forty-three of five feet, thirty of three feet, one of one foot. In six cases (always in the second half of the section) the metrical scheme of the anapaest is infringed: ‘tochno Darius i Girenas’ [like some Darius and Girenas] (I. 47); “miru zdes” o sebe vozveshchaiut, na murav’ia” [one informs the world of oneself by inadvertently stepping on an ant] (I. 77); “ugrozhaet deistvitel’nost’ i, naoborot”, [reality threatens, and vice versa,] (I. 165); “navodniaiut pomekhi, molitva, soobshchen’ia” [gets flooded with static, prayers, weather / reports], (I. 193); “Ottolknuv abazhur, / gliadia priamo pered soboiu” [Pushing aside the lampshade, / look straight ahead of you] (II. 286-7); “pogruzhenykh po krovlju, / na pevtsa usmirennykh peizazhei” [sunk up to the roof, / the singer of pacified landscapes] (II. 332-3).

In some cases this infringement becomes less evident when reading aloud: *naoborot* may be pronounced *navborot*, *soobshchen’ia* as *sobshchen’ia*, restoring the anapaestic scheme.

Additional stress often falls on the initial foot of an anapaestic line, usually on the first syllable. Compare, for example, the beginnings of sections I and II (II. 1-3, 12-13):

Взбаламутивший море
ветер рвется как ругань с расквашенных губ
в глубь холодной державы,...

Wind, having roughened the sea,
bursts forth like cursing from bruised lips
deep within the cold super-power...

Здравствуй, Томас. То - мой
призрак, бросивший тело в гостинице где-то...

Greetings, Tomas. That was my
spectre, having abandoned the body in some
overseas hotel room...

In all there are 93 of these instances (not including arguable ones), which constitutes 31.7 per cent of the total number of metrical lines. The occurrence of supplementary stress on other feet is much rarer —there are around ten instances (compare, for example, I.109: “chtob vlozhit’ pal’tsy v rot – v etu ranu Fomy” [so that he might stick his fingers into his mouth, that wound of Thomas])¹¹. In six cases the stress fails to fall in a strong position: “my v nei nerazlichimei” [we are the indistinguishable] (I. 130); “chelovecheskim golosom i obviniaet prirodu” [in a human voice blaming nature] (I. 171); “Raia, kak zatianuvshiisia minus” [Heaven, like a drawn-out minus] (I. 209); “ikh i netopyrei” [and bats] (I. 256); “dlia setchatki – poskol’ku on ne-

11 - This conforms with the general laws of Russian trisyllabic metre. See M. L. Gasparov, *Sovremennyi russkii stikh: Metrika i ritmika*, Moscow: Nauka, 1974, p. 186: “the distribution of stresses which occur outside the normal scheme in a metrical line displays a clear tendency towards being increased at the beginning of the line and decreased at the end of the line. It follows that as regards ‘weightiness of the line’ (its saturation with stresses over and above the normal scheme) Brodsky is affiliated with Fet and Pasternak, rather than with his contemporaries, who in general steer clear of stress falling outside the normal pattern”.

obitaem” [for the retina, since it’s uninhabitable] (I. 272); “Chem belee, tem beschelovechnei” [The whiter, the less human] (I. 311).

The rhythmical variations described here diversify the anapaest, although on the whole —and this is characteristic of tri-syllabic metres— anapaest creates an impression of monotony. This is all the more perceptible given that *Lithuanian Nocturne* is a long poem, which could even be described as deliberately drawn out. Let us note, incidentally, that it consist, to a considerable extent, of extended narrative phrases and is saturated with long words —often of five syllables with the stress falling on the third syllable (for example, *amal’gamovoi*, *beskonechnost’iu*, *bestelesnosti*, *vzbalamutivshii*, *zabolochennykh*, *zavershaetsia*, *zatianuvshis’ia*, *kolokol’naia*, *oloviannaia*, *otbeliaiushchikh*, *oshchetinivshis’*, *perevernutos’*, *razdelennuu*, *rastekaetsia*, *rasshirenie*, and many more)¹². During the period of his emigration, Brodsky consciously strove for a monotonous “neutral” intonation, which is indeed evident in *Lithuanian Nocturne*. However, the monotony is broken by various devices which give rise to an inner tension within the poem.

Above all the sections of *Lithuanian Nocturne* differ sharply in length¹³, and their construction is very varied.

12 - In all there are 1386 words in *Lithuanian Nocturne* (including prepositions and conjunctions); there are 861 different words (discarding repetition); there are 50 words with five syllables.

13 - The longest section (XVII) consist of 21 lines, the shortest (II) of six lines in all. As regards the number of feet, the most extensive sections are VIII, X and XI (in each of these there are 65 feet; moreover in section XI the metre in one foot is infringed by an additional syllable). The most compact section is II (17 feet). As we can see, the size of the sections fluctuates within a very wide range (I: 3.5-I: 3.8).

Eight of them (III, IV, VI, VII, XII, XIII, XIX, XX) are made up of two sets of sextets¹⁴. They are constructed according to the scheme ABcAbC dEdEf (upper-case letters denoting a feminine rhyme, lower-case a masculine rhyme). Three sections (VIII, X, XIV) consist of three sets of sextets, rhyming in an analogous way. One section (II) consists of a single set of six, again rhyming on the same principle. In all the remaining sections this basic versification and rhyme scheme is violated, moreover, in a different way each time:

- I: AbCAbC dEdE
- V: aBaB cDcD eFgeFg
- IX: aBcAbC dEfddEf gHigHi
- XI: aBcAbC DeDe fGhGh¹⁵
- XV: aBccaBc dEfdeFf gHigHi
- XVI: aBcAbC dEfdeFf gHHg
- XVII: aBcAbC dEfdeFf gHHHH
- XVIII: aBcAbC DeDe
- XXI: aBcAbC dEEd fGGf

The rhyming lines, as a rule, have an uneven number of feet. The complexity, intricacy and diversity of the rhyme scheme is also heightened by the fact that at times there are internal rhymes. See, for example, II. 34-5:

14 - Let us note that these sections are distributed in pairs, and are also symmetrically arranged around the centre of the poem (on mirror symmetry in the poem see n. 41)

15 - An alternative reading (see n.10): aBcAbC dEfEfgHdgHd.

чуть картавей,
чуть выше октавой от странствий вдали...

A bit more burred
and with a higher pitch thanks to distant wanderings...

The lack of correspondence between the metrical scheme and the graphic layout is also evident. The anapaestic line is nearly always divided into two, sometimes three parts, distributed over several adjacent lines, as for example: “I podob’e litsa / rastekaetsia v chernom stekle...” [“And the semblance of a face / spreads itself through the black glass...”] (II. 9-10); “vozhezhi rvet / i krichit zalikhvatski ‘Gerai!’” [“yanks the reins / and roars ‘Gerai!’”] (II. 29-30); “Pozdnii vecher v Imperii, / v nishchei provintsii. / Vbrod...” [“Late evening in the Empire / in a destitute province. / Across...”] (II. 49-51).

The number of graphic lines (335) proves to be appreciably greater than the number of metrical lines (293). This device is not uncommon in Russian poetry written in multi-foot anapaest (compare, for example, Paternak’s *Nine Hundred and Fifth Year*), but Brodsky emphasizes it through his specific arrangement of lines on the page, about which we will speak in more detail below.

A constant feature of Brodsky’s poetry is an exceptionally severe conflict between rhythm and syntax, expressed through enjambments, inversions, breaks in syntagmatic links and so on. This feature is fully evident in *Lithuanian Nocturne*, although here, perhaps, less extremely than in several other poems of the emigration period. Because of the enjambments and inversions in the poem, the rhyme often falls on auxiliary

words (it has been noted that this device —peculiar to English poetry, but until Brodsky very rare in Russian poetry— is one of the resources of defamiliarization¹⁶). Compare: “Izvini za vtorzhen’e. / Sochti poiavlenie za” [“Pardon this invasion. / Consider this sighting as”] (II. 31-2); “Chem sil’nei zhizn’ isporchena, tem...” [“The more broken the life, the more...”] (I. 129); “oka prazdnogo dlia”. [“for the idle eye.”] (I. 131); “i sama zavershaetsia molom, pognavshimsia za...” [“itself ends in a pier, racing after...”] (I. 176); “ot otsutstviia, ot...” [“from absence, from...”] (I. 211); “sut’ prostranstvo v kvadrate, a ne...” [“the space in a square / and not...”] (I. 220); “Muza tochki v prostranstve! Veshchei, razli-chaemykh / lish” [“The Muse of a point in space! Of things visible / only...”] (II. 257-8); “Vot chem dyshit vseennaia. Vot...” [“That is what the universe breathes by. / That ...”]. (I. 300); “ust. V grammatiku bez...” [“of the mouth. / Into that grammar without”] (I. 315).

There is an interesting and typical case, where a word (incidentally, a non-standard, nonce-word) is split in the rhyme position: “zauriadnoe do-re / mi – fa – sol’- lia – si – do izvlekaia iz kamennykh trub”. [“pulling a plain do-re/ mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do from (concrete) pipes”] (II. 4-5).

As Efim Etkind correctly observed, in Brodsky’s poetry a composed, prosaic sentence, eruditely ramified, moves forward, without looking at the metrico-strophic hurdles, as if it existed in its own right and were not taking part in any “poetic game”. But this is not true – it not only takes part in the game, but is, strictly speaking,

16 - See, for example, “Pismo o russkoi poezii” [A letter on Russian Poetry], in *Poetika Brodskogo*, pp. 25-6; Scherr, *Strofika Brodskogo*, pp. 105-107.

the very flesh of the poetry, that which gives it form, entering into a paradoxical, or, more precisely, ironical relationship with it¹⁷. Later on, this contradiction is described by the critic as “a conflict between reason and open emotion, or between the cosmos of consciousness and the chaos of the subconscious, harmony and the elements”¹⁸.

One could say that in *Lithuanian Nocturne*, as in many other poetic works by Brodsky —in almost all of them— two tendencies come sharply into conflict. On the one hand, the poem moves as if in a single seamless flow, approaching prose. Rhyme becomes less evident, being placed unexpectedly; rhythm is partly eroded, an effect which is, paradoxically, promoted by its very monotony. On the other hand, there are multi-dimensional and multi-levelled articulations in the poem, which go beyond the bounds of traditional poetics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rhythm and rhyme are defamiliarized, striving towards greater perceptibility. In particular, there is a strict, refined graphic organization which, from the first glance, says to the reader of *Lithuanian Nocturne* that what he/she has before him/her is by no means prose¹⁹.

The graphic organization of the poem, evidently, dates back to the genre of *carmen figuratum*, which was common during late Antiquity, the Renaissance and Baroque. It features in Brodsky's favourite Eng-

lish metaphysical poets, in Dylan Thomas and others; in Russian literature instances of it can be found in Simeon Polotskii, some of the experimental poets of the Silver Age and in Voznesenskii (though, in the last case, in a vulgarized form). The lines of a poem in the genre of *carmen figuratum* are distributed in such a way that the poem takes on the form of the subject which it describes (a pitcher, a star, even a car in Apollinaire). Sometimes the lines of a poem form a geometric figure. The comical “Stikhi na butylke, podarennoi Andreiu Sergeevu” [Poem on a Bottle, Given to Andrei Sergeev] (1966), is an early experiment of this type by Brodsky. But such exercises in “applied versification” soon give way to serious poetry, where only the special symmetry of the graphic construction²⁰ refers back to the genre of *carmen figuratum*. For example, see: *Fontan* [Fountain] (1967); *Razgovor s nebozhitelem* [Conversation with a Celestial Being] (1970); *Osen' vygoniaet menia iz parka...* [Autumn Drives Me out of the Park] (1970-1); *Babochka* [Butterfly] (1972); and others. *Lithuanian Nocturne* also belongs to these, and is the most extensive poem of this type.

Incidentally, in the graphic form of *Lithuanian Nocturne* —as in that of *Fontan* and *Babochka*— one can also see a certain iconicity. *Fontan* brings to mind the image of a gushing stream of water extending up into the air, while the stanzas of *Babochka* are reminiscent of the unfolded wings of a butterfly; in a similar way, the sections of *Lithuanian Nocturne* bear a distant similarity to a human body seen from *en face* —reflected in a mirror, for example (and indeed, itself

17 - E. Etkind, *Materiia stikha* The stuff of Poetry, Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1978, p.114.

18 - Ibid., p.119.

19 - The first tendency, incidentally, strives for dominance with respect to acoustic perception of the poem, the second, visual perception.

20 - Such poems, the successors, as it were, of the *carmen figuratum* genre, are well-known in the poetry of different countries and ages.

having mirror symmetry²¹). Its outline is indistinct (see II. 86-8): “Vot otkuda moei, / kak ee prodolzhenie vverkh, obolochki / v tvoikh steklakh raspilychatost’...” [Hence the upward continuation of my membrane / washed out in your window...]. It is easy to relate all this to the themes of the *apparition* and the *mirror*, which are essential to the structure of the poem.

At a lexical and grammatical level, the attention is drawn in *Lithuanian Nocturne* to the quantity and diversity of nouns. Brodsky is, in general, a poet of the noun rather than the verb: in this, as in many other respects, he is linked with the line of Mandelstam, rather than Pasternak²². The “poetics lesson”, which he received from Evgenii Rein, is well-known and has already been mentioned in the literature on Brodsky: “A good poem is such that should you apply to it a blotter, which removes the adjectives and verbs, when it is lifted away the page would still nonetheless be black, since the nouns will remain: table, chair, horse, dog wall-paper, couch...”²³. Out of the 1386 words in the poem 595 (42,9%) are nouns, 107 (7,7%) are adjectives, 141 (10,2%) are verbs, 45 (3,2%) are participles. Moreover, 401 of the nouns occur only once each. We find among

them colloquialisms and foreign words, archaisms, sovietisms, and neologisms, geographic, historical and mythological names; besides ordinary words, signifying parts of the body, objects from everyday life, atmospheric and meteorological phenomena, temporal categories or, let us say, religious concepts, *Lithuanian Nocturne* is chockfull of abstract nouns and also philosophical, mathematical, linguistic, literary, musical, architectural and biological terms, terms from physics and chemistry, right down to military and chess terminology (“camouflage cloak” and “stalemate”, respectively). Words which are linked with language, speech and specially writing (for example, “alphabet”, “letter”, “monogram”, “comma”, “Cyrillic alphabet”, “cuneiform”, “type”, “pen”, “brevier”, “written language”, “punctuation marks”, “brackets”, “page”, “full stop”, “quotation”, “cypher”) occupy a significant amount of space.

The syntactical construction of the work, about which we have already spoken in part, is no less characteristic of Brodsky. One’s attention is arrested by long, involved sentences with co-ordinate and subordinate clauses, stuffed with adverbial phrases, parenthetical constructions and so on. On the other hand, parts of sentences often split off into independent sentences. Their dimensions range between one word, such as *Nulia!* (Of zero!) (I. 260), up to 62 words. Such a sentence takes up 16 lines, almost the whole of section XVI (II. 241-56). The rhetorical and logical complexity, interminable digressions, elaborations and enumerations, compel the reader to concentrate on the semantics of the poems (although at times the opposite effect is achieved —one of inarticulateness, ‘rambling speech’, ravings). In any case, the syntax of *Lithuanian Nocturne*, as in most Brodsky’s poems, is defamiliar-

21 - Icons of this type are to be found in the poetry of the Polish poet Aleksander Wat, whom Brodsky valued highly and translated. See Tomas Venclova, *Aleksander Wat: Life and Art of an Iconoclast*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 224-300.

22 - See Mikhail Lotman, *Mandel'shtam i Pasternak (opyt kontrastivnoi poetiki)*, [*Mandelstam and Pasternak (Towards a Contrastive Poetics)*] in *Literary Tradition and Practice in Russian Culture*, eds. V. Polukhina, J. Andrew and R. Reid, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1993, pp. 123-62.

23 - An interview with Brodsky in *Russkaia mysl* (Russian Thought) no. 3450, 3 February 1983, p. 9.

ized and deautomatized although, as has already been said, the poet steers clear of experimental extremes: side-by-side with intricately constructed —or, on the contrary, fragmented— sentences there are (especially in the first half) rapid, comparatively simple sentences, which are nominative or descriptive.

On the thematic level, the poem develops the topos of the meeting of two poets, which is as well known in classical as in romantic poetry —and in particular, in Pushkin²⁴. It is interesting that Brodsky retains, while indeed transforming, many of the motifs entailed by this topos in the work of Pushkin. Here a very early example of the exploitation of this theme by Pushkin is especially brought to mind —the Kishinev poems, in which Ovid is discussed: *Iz pis'ma k Gnedichu* [From a Letter to Gnedich] (1821); *Chaadaevu* [To Chaadaev] (1821); *K Ovidiiu* [To Ovid] (1821); *Baratynskomu. Iz Bessarabii* [To Baratynsky. From Bessarabia] (1822). Just like Brodsky's poem, these take the form of apostrophes, addresses to friends (or to an ancient poet), a fact which is also reflected in their titles. The subject is a meeting of exiled poets in a “desert country”. This country lies on the very edge of an empire —or rather, of two empires: once a remote providence of Rome, many centuries later it became a remote province of Russia. In Brodsky, Bessarabia is replaced by another imperial province —Lithuania. There are still other traits of the Kishinev cycle, which are repeated in *Lithuanian Nocturne*²⁵: in the description of the meeting-place sombre

colours prevail, the meeting itself is conducted at night and the senior poet appears as a shade.

Brodsky felt a deep and constant interest both in the Roman Empire and in Pushkin's era. They both took on archetypal characteristics for him, serving as both criterion and explanation of the present. The theme of Ovid's —just as the theme of Pushkin's exile— is easily projected on to his own biography²⁶. In *Lithuanian Nocturne* Brodsky takes on both roles, Ovid and Pushkin. He takes the form of an apparition —not in the same way, it is true to say, as the ghost of Ovid in the Kishinev cycle, not from a temporal, but a spatial distance, from the New World (which is almost identified with the kingdom of the dead). If Ovid in the Kishinev poems remains a “desert neighbour” and a silent partner of the dialogue, Brodsky (like Pushkin) speaks in the first person, leaving silence to the addressee²⁷. All the same, the theme of the

26 - Compare Brodsky's very interesting comments about Ovid in one of his last essays, *Letter to Horace* (1995). On several intertextual links between these two poets, see, for example, Leon Burnett *The complicity of the Real: Affinities in the Poetics of Brodsky and Mandelstam*, in *Brodsky's Poetics and Aesthetics*, eds. L. Loseff and V. Polukhina, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1990, pp. 23-5. See K. Ichin, *Brodskii i Ovidii Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 19, 1996, pp. 227-49.

27 - At several points in *Lithuanian Nocturne* one might suspect links with the addressee's poetry, which was known to Brodsky in word-for-word translation. Compare: ll. 42-3, “rasshiriaet svoi radius / brennost” [It's merely one's mortality expanding its radius] with “memory, like a pair of compasses, expands its diameter” (“Sutema pasitiko šalčiu”); ll. 55-6: “bulyzhnik mertsat, kak / poimannyi leshch” (“cobblestones glisten / like bream in a net”) with “under the net of a heavy cloud, the narrow squares gleam, like fish” (“Pašnekesys Žiema”); ll. 64-5: “vpadaet vo t'mu ... ruki tvoei ust'e” [And riverlike your hand / falls... into darkness] with “the rivers' estuaries find the dark sea” (“Poeto atminimui. Variantas”); l. 122: “ot stovattoi slezy nad tvoei golovoi” [from the hundred watt tear [shape] over your head] with “where onto a blind brick wall falls the hundred watt, intricate ray of light” (“Sutema pasitiko šalčiu”); l. 314: “bezdummy Borei” [thoughtless Boreas] with

24 - See Boris Gasparov, *Encounter of Two Poets in the Desert: Pushkin's Myth*, in *Myth in Literature*, eds. A. Kodjak, K. Pomorska and S. Rudy, Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1985, pp. 124-53.

25 - Cf. *ibid.*, p. 125.

“two exiles” is retained. The addressee of the poem is also described as an exile in his own country, the mirror double of the author — perhaps that very author in the past.

A section-by-section summary of *Lithuanian Noc-turne* may be presented in the following form:

I. Introduction. Maritime landscape; the appearance of the apparition at the window.

II. Appeal to the addressee.

III. Landscape of the Lithuanian countryside.

IV. Appeal to the addressee; development of the theme of the apparition; account of his flight.

V. Lithuanian townscape (Kaunas).

VI. Description of the addressee's flat.

VII. Portrait of the addressee; attempt to provide a “portrait” of the apparition.

VIII. Meditation on written language; similarities and differences between the apparition and the addressee.

IX. Identification of the apparition and the addressee.

X. Habits of the apparition; meditation on space and time; addressee against the background of the Lithuanian landscape.

XI. Meditation on borders.

XII. Countryside; continuation of the meditation on borders and overcoming them.

XIII. Countryside; motif of the border; speech, sounding in the air (ether).

XIV. Apparition in Kaunas; meditation on air immateriality.

XV. Apparition in Kaunas; meditation on air and speech.

XVI. Meditation on speech (poetry).

XVII. Appeal to the Muse; meditation on speech and air.

XVIII. Meditation on speech, air, immortality.

XIX. Meditation on air and immortality.

XX. Appeal to a muse; reversion of speech into air.

XXI. Coda. Saints Casimir and Nicholas; appeal to the Muse; prayer for the addressee.

As we can see, the poem can be divided in two at the central section XI, which is devoted to the theme of the border (the strictly guarded border of a totalitarian empire, but also the border between the past and the present). The first part could be called “descriptive”, the second “philosophical”. Up to the central section, scenes of the country predominate, of its miserable poverty-stricken life, of the everyday way of life of the addressee, which is equally miserable; after this section there follows a vast and complex meta-literary monologue, dedicated to the kinship of poetic speech and the air. It goes without saying that this division is, to some extent, theoretical: one can speak only of a certain prevailing tonality; just as descriptions run through the second half of the poem, discourse — including the metaliterary — is to be found in the first. Let us trace the development of the principal poetic themes.

The beginning of the poem introduces the theme of the sea (as a border separating the author and addressee). The situation which was foreseen in *Lithuanian Divertissement* has become reality: the poet “stupil na vody” [walked on the water] and found himself in the New World. His spirit, having abandoned his body

“senseless Boreas behind a nameless hill” (“Ode miestui”). It would be inappropriate to speak about “influence” here: in referring to a motif from another poet's text, Brodsky demonstrates how it should be developed.

while still alive, flies above the ocean, home. Here, home still means the empire, from which the poet was exiled. This word, one of the most frequently occurring in the poem²⁸, changes through accumulating new meanings. From the first lines the theme is that of dismal customs of the empire²⁹. From the very beginning we are given the motifs which run right through the poem —cold, darkness, flight, and also music (incidentally, music appears as a simple, but fragmented gamut). It is worth nothing in this connection the emphasized acoustic organization of II. 1-3:

Всбаламутившийся море
ветер рвется, как ругапь с расквашенных губ,
в глубь холодной державы...

Wind, having roughened up the sea,
bursts like cursing from bruised lips
deep within the cold super-power...

The ghost appears at the very end of the section: it presses itself against the window of a familiar flat, looking in³⁰. The glass of the window pane —a new

embodiment of the border— proves to be a mirror as well. Only speech is capable of crossing the surface of the mirror, and connecting a space (and time) which have broken in two. Direct speech also begins from the next section; it goes on for the duration of the poem, and the descriptive passages, continuing from the introduction, as well as the overtly expressed philosophical monologue, are contained within it.

The theme of the apparition goes back not only to Pushkin, but also to the tradition of early Romanticism (Zhukovsky), and further back to folklore. The word *apparition*, itself almost automatically draws on numerous connotations and micro-motifs, which are also present in *Lithuanian Nocturne*: it is usually linked with winter³¹ (Christmas Eve), midnight³², wa-

Brodsky visited this flat and even lived in it for a while; with it are linked events which served as an impetus for *Lithuanian Divertissement*. Beneath the attic, on the second floor of the building, there was some sort of establishment, officially linked with the radio. We suspected (without particular grounds and not entirely seriously), that it was the eavesdropping centre of the Vilnius KGB, and that everything which happened in the attic was automatically recorded. Hence, II. 71-3: "mikrofony spetssluzhby v kvartire pevtsa / pishut skrezhet matratsa i vspleski motiva / obshchei pesni bez slov". [In (...) / (...) the bard's room, the microphones of the special service / tape the screeching mattress and the splash of / a common song without words].

28 - The word *dom/domoi* [home] occurs five times in *Lithuanian Nocturne*; *domosedstvo* [stay at home] once. These words usually appear in marked places (for example, in the rhyme position); the last line begins with the word *dom* [home] (l. 335: "dom i serdtse emu" [his home and his heart]).

29 - Compare: "la, pasynok derzhavy dikoi / s razbitoi mordoï, / drugoi, ne menea velikoi, / priemshy gordyi..." [I, the stepson of a wild power / with a broken snout, / of another, no less great, / am the proud adopted child...] "P'iatstva Mattei" [Piazza Mattei], 1981.

30 - The flat (or, rather, attic) in question is in Vilnius, the one in which the addressee lived from the end of 1970 through to 1973.

31 - Cf. II. 22-3, "Nad zhniv' em Zhemaitii / v'etsia sneg, kak nebesnykh obitelei prakh" [Over the stubble of Zhemaitii / snow weaves like celestial cloisters' ashes]; II. 202-4, "Kel'ner, gliadia v upor, / vidit tol'ko salfetki, ogni bakalei, / sneg, taksi na uglu", [The headwaiter looking straight through it, / sees only napkins, the grocery's lights, / snow, the taxicab on the corner.]; II. 324-7, "To Sviatoi Kazimir / s Chudotvornym Nikoloi / korotaiut chasy / v ozhidanii zimnei zari". [That's St. Casimir and / St. Nicholas the Miracle-maker / whiling time away / in anticipation of winter's dawn].

32 - Cf. II. 67-8, "V polnoch' visakaia rech' / obretaet ukhvatki sleptsya," [At midnight speech / acquires the ways of the blind]; I.170, "Polnoch'.

ter; it is compelled to roam³³, it cracks jokes, one cannot speak to it³⁴, it is only seen by those to whom it appears, remaining invisible to others³⁵, and finally, it disappears at cock-crow. This last micro-motif to some extent determines the composition of the work. At the beginning of his monologue the apparition makes the following assurance (II. 38-9): “sginu prezhd, chem grianet s nasesta / petushinoe ‘pli!’”. [‘I’ll be off before the cock’s “fire” / bursts from the roost.] At the end this prophecy is fulfilled. After section XV, the apparition ceases to refer to himself: he gradually merges with his “natural medium” —the air and the void. Significantly later (in past time) the discourse turns to the promised cock’s crow (II. 300-2): “Vot chem dyshit vseleennaia. Vot / chto petukh kukarekal, / uprezhdaia gortani velikiu sush’!” [‘That is what the universe breathes by. / That is what the cock crowed, / forestalling the great drought for the larynx].

The topos of the apparition undergoes diverse modifications. Having abandoned its body if only for a time, the apparition predicts his future death (“gortani velikiu sush” [‘the great drought for the larynx]) —it talks about its gradual approach, about a certain

slipping away of individuality³⁶, of a build-up of “invisibility” and “absence”. The poet looks at himself from within (coinciding with the apparition) and simultaneously from outside, as though belonging to two different temporal and spatial worlds. This is one of the devices Brodsky uses constantly; in *Lithuanian Nocturne* it is emphasized by the coincidence-non-coincidence of the addresser and addressee. Moreover, the theme appears in an ironic key. For a person who has grown up in the USSR, the word *prizrak* (apparition) automatically correlates with the first sentence of the “Communist Party Manifesto”, which in the Soviet Empire was not only hammered into the brains of school children and students, but also served as the subject of indecent jokes. Hence the humorous nuances of the beginnings of sections XIV and XV: “Prizrak brodit po Kaunasu. Vkhodit v sobor...” [‘A spectre wanders in Kaunas. Enters a cathedral...] (199);

Призрак бродит бесцельно по Кунасу. Он
суть твое прибавление к воздуху мысли
обо мне,
суть пространство в квадрате, а не
энергичная проповедь лучших времен.

A spectre wanders aimlessly in Kaunas. It
is your addition to the air of thought
about me, the space in a square
and not
the energetic sermon of better days. (II. 217-21)

Soika krichit” [Midnight. A [blue]-jay screams]; l. 183, “Polnoch’ v listvennom krae,” [Midnight in a deciduous region].

33 - At the level of syntax and narrative this is reflected in the involved composition of the monologue with its numerous “loops”, recurrences of previous themes and so on.

34 - As we have already noted, dialogue never even arises in *Lithuanian Nocturne*.

35 - See section XIV, which is entirely devoted to this theme.

36 - Compare a line which is characteristic for Brodsky: “Tam chem dal’she, tem bol’she v tebe silueta.” [There, the further you go, the greater your silhouette.] (l. 155).

The incidental word *Makrouis* [Macrowhisiker] (99) refers to “propoved’ luchshikh vremen” [sermon of better days]. It is interesting, though, that the identification of the author with a quotation from the “Manifesto” (I.33) corresponds to a serious moment in the poem —the identification of apparition and text³⁷.

Another important theme of *Lithuanian Nocturne* is the theme of the border, which is also modulated in various forms from the beginning to the end of the work³⁸. We have noted that the border between “the space of the addresser” and “the space of the addressee” at first appears as the sea, then as glass (a mirror)³⁹. The theme of the mirror leads on to theme of the double; section IX is given over to an elaboration of this theme. Compare II. 112-14:

Мы похожи;
мы, в сущности, Томас, одно:
ты, коптящий окно изнутри, я, смотрящий снаружи...

We’re alike.
We, in essence, Thomas, are one.

37 - In this untranslatable joke, in which great play is made with the notion of “a large, (damp?) moustache”, and the sound of the name “Marx”, the moustached Marx and the moustached Stalin —two prophets of the maxim ‘the end justifies the means’ (cf. II. 97-8)— are, evidently, conflated.

38 - On this subject see the end of this article.

39 - We have already touched upon the fact that the category of the border in Brodsky is almost always also emphasized at the purely structural level. Compare in this respect Aleksandr Zholkovsky, ‘Brodsky’s “la vas liubil...” [“I loved you...”]: intertexts, invariants, thematics and structure’, in *Poetika Brodskogo*, pp. 39 ff.

You, smoking the window from within, while I look in from
the outside.

The “myth of the twins”, which is developed in the poem has its origins in *Lithuanian Divertissement*. There the subject of the Gemini sign of the zodiac had already been raised. On the observatory of Vilnius University there is a bas-relief series depicting the signs of the zodiac; the most memorable of these is, namely, the Twins (Castor and Pollux). Here, “prostupaiushchii v Kastore Polluks” [Pollux seeping through Castor] (I.124) corresponds to the addresser and the addressee. Brodsky refers not only (and not so much) to the fact that the addressee is similar to the author in line of work and fate. The author is, in fact, meeting himself, but in another temporal dimension before his emigration —and, perhaps, in a state of prescience of his emigration. The border proves to be a boundary not only in space, but also in time. The distance between the mirror doubles is insurmountable: Lithuania, the homeland and past life is described as “through the looking glass”⁴⁰.

Let us look more closely at this description of Lithuania. It is saturated, or even over-saturated with facts and details of Lithuanian everyday life, but appears strangely dual and flickering. In the words of Mikhail Lotman, “the poet celebrates not an empirically real

40 - Incidentally, what appear to be neutral details at first glance — “zanaves v mestnom teatre” [the curtains of some local theatre] (57) and “zanaveski iz tiulia” [the fringe of / a tulle curtain] (62)— are in fact related to this theme. The theatre in section V is one of the numerous hints at the day-to-day circumstances of the addressee, who at that time worked as a literary consultant at a theatre in the provincial town of Siauliai.

country, but some mental form, which is deposited in his memory”⁴¹. I should add that in this mental image different chronologic strata unite —time spreads out, becomes indistinct. At the beginning the poor countryside of Zhemaitiia is depicted (this is a westerly, coastal area of Lithuania, speaking its own dialect, always more stubbornly resistant than most to imperial attempts to suppress its distinct religion and culture). However, this is not the Zhemaitiia of collective farms during the seventies and eighties, but Zhemaitiia before the Second World War: “zapozdalyi evrei” [A Jewish cabby in a cart, hurr[ying] late] who “po bruschatke mestechka gremit balagoloi” [drum[s] the village’s cobblestones] (II. 27-8), would be an absolutely unthinkable figure in Lithuania after the Holocaust. In this same section yet another theme which is of great importance right through *Lithuanian Nocturne* makes its first appearance —the theme of the written word (writing), which is linked to the theme of religion: “Iz kostelov bredut, khoronia zapiatyte / svechek v skobkakh ladonei” [They wander from churches, burying the commas / of candles in the brackets of [their] palms.] (II. 19-20)⁴². For the reader who is familiar

with the history of Lithuania, this point in the poem is associated with an even earlier epoch — that is to say the period of “the fight for the written language” (1865-1904), when books — above all prayer-books — printed in the Roman alphabet were smuggled into Lithuania from abroad.

In section IV the theme of the border crossing changes once again. In I.47 the lost pilots Darius and Girenas are mentioned⁴³. Along with this reference to them, the motif of the border between states⁴⁴ appears for the first time — moreover, this is a border of the kind it is impossible (or in any case extremely dangerous) to cross. The border of the Empire insurmountably divides the author and his silent interlocutor, the present and the past, the New World and Lithuania. Without delay (in the first line of the next section) the very word “Empire” appears. Note the contrast: “Pozdnii vecher v Litve” [A late evening in Lithuania] (18) – “Pozdnii vecher v Imperii, / v nishchei provintsii” [Late evening

Helsingiensia 11: Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia III: Problemy russkoi literatury i kul'tury, eds. L. Biukling and P. Pesonen, Helsinki, 1992, p. 238.

41 - The “mirror factor” in the poem is also present at the formal level. Apart from the mirror symmetry of the sections which has already been mentioned, the attention is also drawn by the fact that many of them are formed in sets of two, both starting in a similar or identical way. Compare III and V (‘Pozdnii vecher v Litve’ – ‘Pozdnii vecher v Imperii’), XII and XIII (‘Polnoch’. Soika krichit’ – ‘Polnoch’ v listvennom krae’), XIV and XV (‘Prizrak brodit po Kaunasu’ – ‘Prizrak brodit bestsel’no po Kaunasu’), and similarly VII and XVI (‘Vot otkuda toi’ – ‘Vot otkuda pera’). Let us note in addition that the syllabic palindrome “bezlikii likbez” [Into your faceless “likbez”] (318) is like a mirror set into a line.

42 - M. Iu. Lotman, “Baltiiskaia tema v poezii Iosifa Brodskogo” [The Baltic Theme in the Poetry of Joseph Brodsky], in *Slavica*

43 - It was precisely these lines which were quoted as being especially characteristic of Brodsky by the Secretary of the Swedish Academy Sture Allen in his speech when Brodsky was presented with the Nobel Prize, 10 December 1987.

44 - Steponas Darius and Stasys Girenas were American aviators of Lithuanian ancestry who, in July 1933, crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a small and ill-equipped aeroplane; they set out from New York for Kaunas, but were lost over what was then German territory. The legend is doggedly upheld (probably in error) that they were killed by the Nazis. Darius and Girenas became national heroes in Lithuania (in fact they are not forgotten in the USA either). The remains of their plane are kept in the war museum in Kaunas. This story made a considerable impression in Brodsky —at one time he was even intending to write a long narrative poem about the flight of the two Lithuanians.

in the Empire / in a destitute province.] (II. 49-50). At the beginning we are given a hint of the border of tsarist Russia, which passed through the Neman [Nemunas]. Crossing that river, Napoleon once took Kovno [Kaunas], an act which started the 1812 war (in 1915 Kaiser Wilhelm II did the very same thing). Compare II. 51-3:

Вброд
перешедшее Неман еловое войско,
ощетинившись пикми, Ковно в потемки бредет.

Having waded across the Neman,
an army of conifers bristling with lances
takes Kaunas into the darkness.

But almost straight away there follows a detail which unmistakably indicates the post-Stalinist Soviet Union—a bottle of vodka ‘divided in three’ (II. 58-60).

И выносят на улицу главную вещь,
разделенную на три
без остатка...

And the most important thing gets brought out
to be divided by three
down to the last drop⁴⁵.

Further on, Lithuania is discussed in a totally concrete epoch—that in which the poem is written. The timeless, rural landscape gives way to a sovietized, ur-

ban setting. Some “doubling” and temporal and spatial erosion none the less remains. There are hints at tsarist Russia; for example, these characteristic pre-revolutionary words: “v gubernii tsveta pal’to” [in a province the colour of topcoats] (I. 184); “na’ pevtsa usmirenykh peizazhei” [the singer of *pacified* landscapes] (I. 333). The contemporary restaurant turns out to be the “litovskoi korchmoi” [Lithuanian inn] of I. 106—that is to say, the inn on the Lithuanian border from Puchkin’s *Boris Godunov*. A medieval ruler of Lithuania, Prince Vytautas’ appears (he was also mentioned in *Lithuanian Divertissement*); moreover, he tries to cross the border “k shvedam” [towards Sweden] (II. 174-5)—a situation referring to much more recent times. The addressee’s flat is in Vilnius, but the apparition, while talking to him, wanders around Kaunas⁴⁶. However, the impenetrable boundary separating Lithuania from the world and the past poet from the present is described unambiguously (II. 154-9, 189-91):

46 - Alcoholism is yet another of the themes which runs through *Lithuanian Nocturne*. It is set out in a humorously blasphemous key. Religious motifs (the wound, into which the celestial patron of the addressee, the apostle Thomas, laid his fingers; the Mother of God with her child; the prophet Isaiah), are refracted through cultural texts (Lithuanian folk sculpture; “Pushkin’s Prophet”): they are presented—as is often the case with Brodsky—in a parodying and shocking form. See II. 109-11: “chtob vlozhit’ pal’tsy v rot – v etu ranu Fomy – / i, nashchupav iazyk, na maner serafima / perepravil’ glagol” [so that he might stick his fingers into his mouth, that wound of Thomas, / and feeling his tongue, in the manner of some Seraphim / redirect the verb.]; II. 145-50: “v syroi konoplinoi / mnogoverstnoi rubakhe, v gudiashchikh stal’nykh bigudi / Mat’-Litva zasypaet nad plesom, / i ty / pripadaesh’ k ee neprikrytoi, steklianno, / pol-litrovai grudi”. [in its multi-versted / shirt of hemp, in its droning steel curlers, / Mother Lithuania falls asleep along the river, / and you / fall to her uncovered, glass / half-litre breast.] (It is worth noting that the identification of the bottle with the maternal breast stems from Freud.)

45 - Compare the word *kordonov* [borders] (42).

Там шлагбаумы на резкость наводит верста.
Там чем дальше, тем больше в тебе силуэта.

Там с лица сторожа
моложавей. Минувшее смотрит вперед
настороженным глазом подростка в шинели,
и судьба нарушителем пятится прочь ...

[...]
...железо,
плюс обутий в кирзу
человек государства.

The railroad crossings are brought into focus by versts.
There, the further you go, the more of what is left of you is a
silhouette.

There the guards appear
younger. What has just come to pass looks ahead
with the guarded eye of a teen in an overcoat,
and fate, the trespasser, backs away...

[...]
cast-iron,
plus a shod-in-ersatz leather
man of the state.

This is the border of a totalitarian “superpower” (I.143), of a world “where nothing changes” (I. 152) —of a world of which the Berlin Wall was all but the main symbol. Even a description of a starry sky (II. 107-8) or the relationship of the addresser and the addressee (I. 123) is given in terms which stem from the experience of life in the Soviet Empire: “do litsa, mnogooko smotriashchego mimo / kak raskosyi mongol za zem-

noi chastokol”⁴⁷ [and the face, multieyed, looking past / like some squint-eyed Mongolian at the palisade]; “My —vzaimnyi konvoi ...”⁴⁸ [We’re a mutual convoy].

It would be a flagrant over-simplification to interpret all these images only politically (although this level of interpretation is also vital). The issue, as usual for Brodsky, is above all about loneliness, despair, loss of a link with the world in its entirety, existence in the face of death, the “boundary situation”, as an existentialist philosopher would say.⁴⁹

At this point there arises the characteristic opposition of two Muses —“novoi Klio, odetoi zastavoi” [of a new Clio, adorned in an outpost] (I. 228) and “obnazhennoi Uranii” [to naked Urania] (I. 230)⁵⁰, that is to say, of history which equals slavery and death, and poetry which is linked to the void of the world; this void is, however, overcome by the creative act⁵¹. This

47 - Compare the same “Eurasian” theme: *tatarva* [a horde] (I. 163); *pechenegom* [Pecheneg-like] (I. 169).

48 - Compare *sogliadatai* [your tail] (I. 216)

49 - Incidentally, the apparition is linked with the theme of the border by virtue of the fact that it is situated on the border between life and death, dream and reality, night and day (cf. II. 132-4 and 162-9).

50 - It is developed in 1982 in the poem *To Urania*, which gave its name Brodsky’s collection of poems entitled *Urania* (1987) in Russian and *To Urania* in the English translation: “Because of that Urania is older than Clio”. Compare also the echo between II. 278-9 of *Lithuanian Nocturne* and the first line of *To Urania*: “U vsevo est’ predel: / gorizont – u zrachka, u otchaian’ia – pamiat’ ...” [Everything has its limit: / for the pupil its the horizon, for despair – memory...]; “U vsego est’ predel: v tom chisle u pechali” [Everything has its limit; including sorrow].

51 - In this, one is justified in perceiving Brodsky’s links with the acmeists (above all Mandelstam), although Brodsky emphasizes nihilism more.

returns us to the third basic theme in Lithuanian *Noc-turne*, which is introduced from sections II and III on the theme of speech, and also writing.

The theme is developed in sections VI-VIII. Here, in particular, the addresser and the addressee are both described —and contrasted— in terms of writing and grammar (II. 84-97):

Вот откуда твои
щек мучнистость, безадресность глаза,
шепелявость и волосы цвета спитой,
тусклой чайной струи.
Вот откуда вся жизнь как нетвердая честная фраза,
на пути к запятой.
Вот откуда моей,
как ее продолжение вверх, оболочки
в твоих стеклах расплывчатость, бунт голытьбы
ивняка и т. п. , очертанья морей,
их страниц перевернутость в поисках точки,
горизонта, судьбы.

Наша письменность, Томас! с моим, за поля
выходящим сказуемым! с хмурым твоим
домоседством
подлежащего! Прочный, чернильный союз,
кружева, вензеля,
помесь литеры римской с кириллицей...

Hence all of life –
like some soft honest phrase
moving comma-ward.
Hence the upward continuation of my membrane
washed out in your windows,
the mutiny of the masses of willow twigs, etc. outlines
of seas,

their upside down pages in search of a full stop,
the horizon, fate.

Our writing, Tomas! With my predicates
[spilling] beyond margins! With your dour, homebody
subjects! A sturdy alliance of ink,
lace, monograms,
the mixtures of Roman typeset with Cyrillic...⁵²

The words relating to Roman type and the Cyrillic alphabet, evidently refer not only to the fact that the author and the addressee are primarily participants in different cultural worlds —East and West (Brodsky crossed the border which separated them when he travelled out of the Soviet Union and became a bilingual writer). This is, perhaps, yet another allusion to the Lithuanian “fight for its written language”, for its own cultural tradition, for the Roman alphabet rather than Cyrillic —that is to say, it is the development of the motif which we saw in section III.

After a long break, the second half of section XIII is devoted to the theme of speech, and here for the first time speech is linked with air. “Nochnoi kislorod” [Evening’s oxygen] (I.192) —this is the ether in which meaningless snatches of words, melodies and sounds float as if extending the daily life of the superpower. Or, rather, it is precisely in the air that it is possible to cross the imperial border. In it are audible not only forbidden things/prohibitions, but also prayers (II. 193, 197). The theme takes yet another, rather unexpected

52 - Compare further on: “Nashi ottiski” [Our imprints] (I. 100).

turn. Almost everyone who lived in the Soviet Union and contiguous countries, remembers the Western radio broadcasts, which were most clearly audible at night. On these, poetry could often be heard, including Brodsky's poems. (Lines 42-4 evidently refer to the radio-waves.) Is not the apparition, crossing the ocean, identical with these poems?

The identification of the apparition with speech (written language) and the air grows closer towards the end of the poem (II. 222-6):

Не завидуй. Причисли
привиденье к родне,
к свойствам воздуха - так же, как мелкий петит
рассыпаемый в сумраке речью картавой
вроде цокота мух...

Don't be envious. Rank this ghost
as one of kin,
the properties of air – the same as some fine brevier
falling apart in the twilight as burred speech
sort of like the buzzing of flies...

Right after this point the apparition is lost from sight. As we said, he goes off into his "natural medium", tearing himself "away from patrimonial marshlands" (I. 243), he melts into the air and emptiness. The sentence which describes his disappearance, or rather transformation (II. 241-56) is a key one in *Lithuanian Nocturne*. This fact is emphasized by different means. It has already been mentioned that it is the longest sentence of all in the poem, regardless of whether one counts the words or the lines; it has convulsive, writhing syntax broken up by parentheses; the punctuation

is over-saturated with dashes; finally, at the end of the sentence the anapaestic scheme is abruptly disrupted. The apparition coincides with the poem, which dwells in the very same medium —namely the air, in which it sounds, the ether, permeated with voices on the radio waves, a nocturnal emptiness of non-existence.

The apparition already had a distinctive "ontological status" in Zhukovsky's poetry: it was both an creature and a sign, a participant in communication and a symbol of it, a messenger from another world and the testimony of its existence⁵³. Brodsky takes up what seems, at first glance, to be a distant tradition, and characteristically transforms it: the apparition is the text of *Lithuanian Nocturne* —that is to say, the trace of the poetic impulse⁵⁴. What is more, it is pure meaning, disengaged from the sign (II. 245-7):

от страницы, от букв,
от - сказать ли! - любви
звука к смыслу, бесплодности - к массе

From the page, from the letter,
from —do I dare say it— the love
felt by sound —for sense, by the incorporeal— for mass...

53 - On this subject see S. Senderovich, "Mir mimoletnykh videnii" [The World of Fleeting Visions], in Marena Senderovich and Savelii Senderovich, *Penaty* [*Penates*] (East Lansing, MI: Russian Language Journal), p. 21.

54 - It has been pointed out that it is characteristic of Brodsky to identify himself with the word, existence with writing (and, let us add, with the uttering of words). See, for example, Valentina Polukhina, "Grammatika metafor i khudozhestvennyi smysl" [The grammar of metaphor and artistic meaning], in *Poetika Brodskogo*, p. 91.

It is precisely this which proves to be the supreme value, the only alternative form of existence available to humanity. Incidentally, the traditional forms of good and evil appear here —the statues of angels on the Lithuanian Catholic churches and bats, which are latently linked with demons (II. 252-6):

эта вещь воспаряет в чернильной ночи эмпирей
 мимо дремлющих в нише
 местных ангелов:
 выше
 их и нетопырей.

... this thing soars in the inky darkness of empyrean
 past the dreaming local angels in niches
 above them
 and bats.

The following sections are, indeed, “a hymn to the air”. Air is the most frequent noun (and the most frequent significant word) in *Lithuanian Nocturne*: it occurs seven times in the poem⁵⁵. It acquires many layers of meaning —not least, religious. The air is a universal void, the dwelling-place of Urania (II. 257-60):

Муза точки в пространстве! Вещей, различаемых
 лишь
 в телескоп! Вычитанья
 без остатка! Нуля!

The Muse of a point in space! Of things visible only

through a telescope! Of subtraction
 with nothing left over! Of zero!

The air is associated with a white sheet of paper, just as the hopeless Vilnius night is associated with ink: “Net na svete veshchei, bezuprechni / (krome smer-ti samoi) / otbeliaiushchikh list” [“There is no other thing more flawless / (other than death itself) / when it comes to bleaching the page.”] (II. 308-10). Air is a celestial kingdom, dwelling-place of souls, or, rather, of voices, which have survived the body: “Nebosvod - / khor soglasnykh i gласnykh molekul, / v prostorechii - dush” [“Heaven’s vault is / a molecular chorus of consonants and vowels, / in common parlance – souls”] (II. 304-6). Air is the place where the orphanhood of the poet is overcome through breathing —that is, through speech: “Muza, mozno domoi?” [“Muse, can we go home?”] (I. 312); “Sirotstvo / zvuka, Tomas, est’rech’!” [“The orphan / of sound, Tomas, is speech!”] (II. 284-285).

It is, precisely, in the air —or in the ether, or in the heavens, or on a sheet of paper— that the last scheme of *Lithuanian Nocturne* plays itself out. The earthly twins —the author and the addressee— are replaced by the heavenly twins. These are the patrons of Lithuania and of Russia, of two countries, whose fates are antithetical but none the less close —one might say unmerged yet inseparable. The poem ends with a prayer addressed to both saints and to the third, “poetic saint” —Urania. The meaning of *home* and *border* is transformed for the last time: *home for the poet is poetry*; that is the meaning guarded by the lines: “V kontse tam nado vlez’t na vysokuiu gory...” [“At the end there you have to scale a high mountain...”]. ■

55 - The next most frequent words are: *thing*, *Muse* and the name of the addressee, *Tomas* (each of which occurs six times).